

the blows would be expected to fall when reverse parallel fighting. The lack of thickened skin on the rump contrasts with the situation in mountain goat which has its thickest skin in this area (Geist 1967). This corresponds to the fighting position of shoulder to shoulder in tahr, compared to the head to tail orientation of mountain goats (Geist 1964). The

thickness of the skin on the chest of the male Himalayan tahr suggests a need for protection for that area of the body, but few blows would likely be delivered there in reverse parallel fighting. Perhaps quick hooks following frontal clashing would, and further observations of dominance fights in Himalayan tahr may bear this out.

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## 4. A SHORT NOTE ON A NEW FOUND GROUP OF TAHR

This is a report on an isolated pocket of Nilgai Tahr (*Hemitragus hylocrius*) in the southernmost reaches of the Western Ghats in the Veerapuli range of forests in the district of Kanyakumari in Tamil Nadu. The Tahr is found in four adjacent hillocks, locally called Variadu Mottai (Tamil for Tahr Butte). These hills at 8° 26'N and 77° 22'E reach an altitude of about 3,000 feet (c. 1000 m). The area can be described as

montane grassy hill tops with riverine gallery forests on its slope and base. The Nilgiri Tahr inhabits mainly the steep cliffs that form part of the topography of the area. The hills overlook the Pechipara reservoir to the northwest and Perunchani reservoir to the south. The next nearest herd to these hills lives in the Pechiparai cliffs and Kalamali hills more than a distance of 20 km separates them.

In the last seven years I have made many

visits to this location for the purpose of photographing and observing Tahr. The total population in all the four cliffs will be about 30 to 35 animals. At any single time I couldn't count them according to population composition of age and sex class. At each peak I used to find a herd of about 10 or 11 females with one saddleback in attendance during the mating season, or groups of males in twos and threes separately. I have observed their feeding pattern to follow a schedule. The animals actively graze till about 9 a.m. after which they rest or retreat to the rocky cliffs and also adjacent Shola forests and reappear after 3 or 4 p.m. back at their grazing grounds. Once I saw them deep inside the wooded area taking shelter from buffeting wind during a rainstorm. On three separate occasions I saw three adult males bed down for the night in rocky crevices with overhanging vegetation. In fact one very old saddleback was killed by a poacher in one of these crevices in the night. Local poachers know of this habit and go searching for them in such hide-outs. However, it is also known that Nilgiri Tahr grazes along with village cattle that is driven up the hills during summer months. They show hardly any fright even when the cattle are accompanied by man. The herd usually has a sentinel female, which despite sighting me did not leave its post, but had me in its sight for about 45 minutes, watchful of course, ready to sound

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the alarm if the need arose. Rice (1986) remarks that the Nilgiri Tahr does not have twin births, but the female if it loses its kid may mate again and have a second kid during the same season. However in February 1986 I observed two young kids of same size tagging behind one female for more than an hour. I realize this is a one-time observation.

In short, what I have observed is an isolated population in one of the southernmost reaches of the western ghats. They are cut off from other herds of Tahr in many ways, mainly by the effects of man, plantation, dams, hydel projects and roads. It would be interesting to study this small herd in more detail to see the effects on their genetics through breeding in isolation. I suggest that this herd be protected from further ravages of man. The loss of even one more herd, however, small it may be, to dams and plantation, which have disturbed them most in this area, will be a grievous loss to the existing population. Poaching is on the increase now. Very recently a saddleback was shot dead.

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MAHESH DANIEL

#### 5. BLACKBUCK BEHAVIOUR AND HORN SIZE

Since July 1986 we have been looking into the herd structure of the Blackbuck at Rehakuri Sanctuary, Maharashtra. In the mixed herd there was one large male with both its horns broken. Though its horns were not more

than 6 to 10 inches long, it was indeed one of the dominant males and seemed to command great respect despite the short stumpy horns.

After the next rut he was seen along with